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THE PARTICIPATION OF MARYLAND BLACKS IN THE CIVIL WAR: PERSPECTIVES FROM ORAL HISTORY

by

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ABSTRACT

The testimony of one informant on the participation of Maryland Blacks in the Civil War is evaluated for its historicity. Comparison with documentary sources reveals a number of correspondences, and the emphasis in passages selected by the informant expose meaningful historical criteria indicating pride in Black accomplishments and the creative, adaptive decisions of Blacks to rapidly changing conditions.

The aims of this paper are to contribute, however modestly, to studies of the participation of Maryland Blacks in the Civil War and to illustrate the ways in which the historicity of a single informant's oral testimony can be evaluated.¹

Although the historical literature on Blacks during the Civil War period is substantial (*e.g.*, Mohr 1974) and it includes several noteworthy studies focusing on Black involvement in the war itself (Brown 1867; Cornish 1966; Higginson 1962; McPherson 1965; Quarles 1953; Wilson 1890), the perspectives of ordinary Black participants in the War are generally lacking. It is those perspectives which might be revealed by the collection of oral testimony. Historians writing about the Civil War period in Maryland have focused either on state politics or on the strategic geographical location of the state (*e.g.*, Clark 1952; Duncan 1977). With few exceptions (see Wagandt 1964), Blacks have received little attention. This is especially characteristic of studies of the Maryland Eastern Shore, that portion of the state east of Chesapeake Bay. Histories are few and are social and political accounts of the White population. Blacks are treated in "segregated" chapters, if they are mentioned at all (Ingraham 1898; Clark 1950; Preston 1976; Tilghman 1967). Rarely are the roles of Blacks detailed, and seldom does a Black perspective emerge through primary documentation.

The geographic focus in this paper is on a section of Talbot County known as Miles River Neck on the Maryland Eastern Shore.² This 15,000 acre section (roughly one-twelfth of the total county acreage) is of special interest, since the great 19th century abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, spent part of his youth here, prior to his flight to freedom. At the time, he was a slave of the chief overseer on the estate of Edward Lloyd. A succession of Lloyds had been the major landholders and slaveowners in Miles River Neck (and Talbot County) from the 17th through the mid-19th centuries. In the early 1850s, Edward Lloyd owned over 7,000 acres in Miles River Neck and more than 275 slaves who lived on this plantation (Lloyd Papers, Roll 40).

During the several decades following the 1864 emancipation of Blacks and the end of the Civil War, some former slaves and free Blacks settled in Miles River Neck on land sold or rented to them by a handful of Whites. By the mid 1880s, two all-Black settlements, Unionville and Copperville, had been established.

Joseph Sutton, whose oral testimony on the Civil War period is presented in this paper, was born in Copperville in 1885. He worked for the first time at age nine and labored during his life in a variety of tasks — cutting corn, threshing wheat, tending stock and performing many other chores in Talbot County's predominantly agricultural economy; helping butchers, carpenters, plumbers, and bridge builders; oystering when he was young; chauffeuring; and raising dogs. He went to school for several months only ("Didn't get no schoolin, just as well say"), the competing pulls of familial obligations and of work overriding the importance of education. He married and raised four children in Miles River Neck, and, until in the early 1950s, was always on the move from one rented house to another. When he was interviewed in 1976, Joseph Sutton was 90 years old. Excerpts from Civil War material elicited from him follow a brief discussion of the sociopolitical background to the Civil War.³

Talbot County in the Early 1860s

On the eve of the Civil War, the large slave-owning population made Talbot County appear very Southern. There were a few pockets of pro-North sentiment that prevented unanimous opposition to the Union. Still, the philosophy of the slave-owners, who stood to lose a great deal by emancipation, dominated County sentiment and politics. Throughout the late 1850s, slave traders were active, and slaves were bought and sold at the Marketplace in Easton, the County seat. The final public sale of slaves took place in August 1863, fourteen months prior to the emancipation (Easton *Gazette*, May-December 1858, 29 August 1863).

At the outbreak of the Civil War, the posture of many Whites in Maryland was ambiguous and undecisive. Broadly speaking, there was a split between the Southern sympathizing, homogeneous, agrarian Eastern Shore and the pro-Union, heterogeneous, industrialized Western Shore (Bast 1950; Clark 1952; Duncan 1977).⁴ Talbot County — and Eastern Shore — sentiment is revealed in the 1860 statement from Easton:

That Maryland is essentially a Southern State in association, in feeling, in interest and in domestic relations; that her destiny is interwoven with that of her sister Southern States; and that her action will be firm and unyielding in the maintenance and vindication of her Constitutional rights (Duncan 1977:355).

Maryland's geographical position was too crucial to allow such sentiment to flourish, and military law was declared in Talbot County (Clark 1952:2).

In late 1863, slavery was abolished in Maryland, effective on November 1, 1864, and many Talbot County Whites reacted by apprenticing or binding Black children in virtual slavery (Easton *Gazette*, November 5, 1864; Gutman 1976:402-403). In 1863 and 1864, numerous free Blacks and slaves were recruited from Talbot County to fight in the Union Army (Blasingame 1967; Wagandt 1967). In Maryland, over 8,000 Blacks enlisted or were recruited; 1,500 of these were killed or wounded (Koger 1942).

But what were the experiences of these Talbot County Blacks who were recruited? Answers to this, seemingly not in any documentary source, are sought in oral history.

Joseph Sutton's Folk History

Five passages on the Civil War period are presented below; a discussion follows.

(1) In the first passage is an explanation of how Blacks first became involved in the Civil War, a description of their performance in battle, and an opinion on the importance of Blacks in the Union's military efforts.

The North couldn't whip the South, that is the way the slaves got free. And then after that they got the slaves in there, that made thousands and thousands of more help for the North and then the North could whip the South. And the Quakers I believe was the cause of the Black man getting free. Cause they had suggested gettin the slaves on their side and some of the others said, "No, we don't want them. The first time you hear a gun fire," say, "they'll run." And the Quakers told em, "You'll never know that unless you try it." And that's the time they commenced recruitin the Black man.

And they found out he had more nerve than the other men did. Cause he was used to being told what to do and he had to do it. He tell em to take a place well they would go until the last man was shot down. They carried a bunch of em down to Sumter, South Carolina and the fort was facing the water and they carried em ashore, facin this fort. And sent em ahead with no Whiteman leadin em. And they cut em down, just a cuttin em down. Come back, regroup again, send another group and they'd do the same thing. Just go as long as they was told to go. Have to call em back. And after the second wave, well, the officer decided they was alright, say "they'll stand." And he just did that just to try the nerve of em. And then they was a big help to em. Hadn't been for that the South would've whipped the North.⁵

(2) The second passage describes the recruitment of slaves from Edward Lloyd's Miles River Neck Farms and the reactions of one Black and of Lloyd to the recruitment process.

The man that was recruitin soldiers went to all of em that owned farms here, and picked up the men cause there was no law to stop em. That was Ben Blackwell, he was relations to John Blackwell. Well he went around to all Colonel farms. There was one old man was very bowlegged, I heard this man tell it hisself, said when he come recruitin them, say he was in the field plowin and Ben Blackwell come lookin at him and told him, said, "they wouldn't want you," say, "you'll do more good here growin food," say, "there ain't no use a carryin you, you won't make a soldier." He was so bowlegged you could roll a barrel between his legs. And that come from somethin the children shoulda had when they was babies and children comin up. That was Davis Farm, and Uncle Perry Blake say he was in the field plowin.

Ben Blackwell was one time, maybe the onliest he was over here, recruitin down at Colonel Lloyd's farms. He had pretty near a dozen farms besides Wye, and old man Harrison Roberts was born and raised up to that time on Four Hundred. That's where his mother and him lived. Well, he didn't want to go and Ben Blackwell told him he had to go. "If you don't," say, "you're gonna put in jail." So he went with

em and he got out to the Meetin House, he stopped and told Ben Blackwell he had to go in the woods to do a job. And old man Ben stopped the men and they waited for Harrison to come back. And old man Ben say eh thought there was somethin wrong. He commenced calling Harrison. No Harrison answered. So old man Ben told the men, "well, come on, we'll go," say "and I'll report it and they'll get him." In the meantime, before he stopped the men for goin in the woods, one of em said, "Harrison," say, "you gonna leave them two big fat hogs you got there at Four Hundred?" That's the time he say he had to go in the woods. And they went on and old man Harrison from that day went back down to Wye to be close to Colonel Lloyd for protection and he stayed there until he was disable to work.

And they never saw old man Harrison until the war was over and they come back here again. Old man Harrison had pulled that woods over em. That was the first day he went down to Wye. Course the Colonel kept him. And was glad to get him because all his able men was gone. Colonel Lloyd was against the recruitin. He didn't do nothin to help the side he was on. No indeed there'd never had been no war if people like that had their say, he had too much to lose. That was his wealth they was takin away from him.

(3) In the third passage, one Black who escaped from slavery on Lloyd's farms was recruited into the Union Army in Baltimore. Later, during a Virginia battle, he encountered a Talbot County White who was fighting for the Confederacy.

Old man Matthew Roberts, he belonged to Colonel Lloyd. And the overseer wanted to whip him and he runned off. And he ran from Wye over here to New Design, and they got after him on horseback. Well he could distance em cause he could run in the woods or he could run from field to field and if there wasn't a gate there they'd have to go a long distance sometimes to get into the next field. He got down here to the head that creek when they got about half-way to the field. And he runned down and throwed his hat overboard. Sailed it out as far as he could like he had gone across to the other side. And then he turned shore and wheeled around and gone around to the edge of the shore, where was lots of these wild grapesvines and they was up high and you couldn't see a man down in the bank if you was up in the field. And he hid hissself in these vines. When they got down to the shore, he was close enough to hear one of em say "there he is" say "he's gone overboard." And the overseer of the place where he ran from say "yea" say "let him go." Say, "there's his hat." Say, "he drowned hissself and ain't no use lookin for him." Say "I'm glad he did." And old man Matt was layin in them vines. They didn't see him. Then when they left he got out and went down here to Miles River Bridge. They used to have a day boat, steamer run up to Miles River Bridge. And he got on that steamer and went to Baltimore. When they was recruitin soldiers in Baltimore, of course they got him.

And then they had that big battle in Virginia and he got crippled in the leg. After the battle, the enemy side was going over the field killin all that was wounded. They didn't pick em up to help em. They killed em. And Mr. Louis Trail, he lived in Easton, him and another man was together and they come to Matthew Roberts. Matthew was talking and tryin to get them not to kill him and this man, he had drawed the butt of his old gun back to hit him in the head. And Mr. Trail looked and he hollered this man, said, "don't hit that man, don't that man! don't hit that man!" Say, "I know him." He must've knowed him through being down to Wye. Say, "I know him. He come from home," say, "and I want him to carry a message to my

father.” When he come up there he spoke to old man Matt. Old man Matt recognized him. He told him whatever it was he told him to tell his father. Say, “they gonna send you home. You’re wounded.” Hadn’t been for that he’d a got killed.

Trail fought for the South. A lot of em North fought for the South. They used to go down to the closest place where it was a Southern soldier and I think that was Virginia and God knows how many of em waited until night and they’d get in a sailboat and go on down where it was. Lot of em from here.

Old man Matthew was shot somewhere in the leg and that’s what killed him. He come home there and lived several years, but he used to always have trouble with his leg. And towards the last, it would swell up twice its size and smell, and they want to cut it off, he wouldn’t let em cut it off. And after awhile it killed him.

(4) The next four excerpts discuss the experiences of Joseph Sutton’s mother’s father, Alexander Flamer; a gesture of apparent protest by John Copper, a former Lloyd slave; a note on the bravery of another former slave; and the roles of teamsters in the war.

My grandfather Flamer said they tried you out to see how you could shoot, said, to make a sharpshooter out of you. And he say he was in the bunch they was trying out and he was hittin the bull’s eye everytime. The other men shootin off from it, missin. Wasn’t nobody in the nother bunch, unless it was once or twice, that hit the bull’s eye. So after it was over, the men got together, no officer around, they got to talkin. They said, “they gonna make a sharpshooter out of you.” He say, “I’m already a sharpshooter.” They say, “well that’s what they was trying you out for. There you see, we didn’t hit that target.” And my grandfather said it scared him then. They carried him out again and he said he didn’t hit nothin. He was bad as they was, cause a sharpshooter’s life is a whole lot shorter than the other man.

My grandfather, I overheard him speakin about was a man in their company. They didn’t have any tents down South, the bunch my grandfather was in, and nights they’d stay in the woods. And they had a man there that carried a pocketful of knives, and he was always off to hisself. He’d be in hearing distance and he’d stick them knives around in a circle and that’s where he’d stay. And some of em tried to creep up on him just to see what he was doin but he never turned his back. He said, “far and no farther,” say, “cross that line,” say, “you’ll die.” And they’d fly back to their company again . . .

And John Copper fought in the war. Well he didn’t fight either. Old man Copper heard if you lose your fore finger on the hand that you pulled the trigger with, why you wasn’t no good as a soldier. And he shot his fore finger off. And that settled him. I think they sent him home. But say he did that on purpose. Put his finger right over the muzzle of the gun and tripped the trigger and that blowed his finger off. He was just a little smarter than the majority of the soldiers. He’d rather lose that finger than lose his life. And he should’ve done it because it was a benefit to him and the others . . .

I forgot nowwhere that long battle was fought, I believe that was in Virginia that big Battle of Bull Run. And I heard old man John Blackwell say he was in it and Ike Johnson, that was one of the Colonel’s slaves. And this man was carryin the flag well, he got shot. Ike Johnson saw the flag fallin and he run and grab it sayin “I ain’t gonna let it hit the dirt.” And he carried it the rest of the war. Didn’t get killed. Now they was brave, and they knowed if they won the war they’d get free, they had something to fight for . . .

They had several men that was small men that wouldn't make a soldier. Not that they were scared but they was small. And they'd tend to the horses and mules, they didn't go into battle. It's a place in Virginia, Geesburg [?] that was a great place for the government horses. And that's where they stayed. And they were just to handle the horses. Feed em and clean em, hook em up when they need em. They didn't even carry a gun.

And then when war was over they didn't get no pension, they never got a cent. They wasn't in no battle. But they was in a position that they could've got killed. Cause the enemies could've made a raid on the place where they was takin care of the stock. And they was workin for the government just like the others was. Course they wasn't takin as big a risk.

Old man Alfred Hayward, he lived on one of Colonel Lloyd's farms, he was little and Uncle Zeke Emory, my stepfather's father, he was very little. Them was the two I used to hear speak of Geesbury. They say they was too small to make a soldier. And John Moody, he may've been a horse tender. Them ones was teamsters never got no pensions. They were there, they was putting up their life there, they never got a cent.

Discussion

One of the major assumptions underlying this analysis is, following Montell, that folk history "is worthy of being recorded, for it can serve as a historical record" (1970:viii); the narratives both "articulate the feelings of a group toward the events and persons described" (Ibid:xxi) and they may be compared with other versions of history, thereby allowing some provisional statements on historical accuracy. This is of some importance in this specific study, as the narratives were elicited from a single informant.

The notion that oral testimony is inferior to documents as historical evidence unfortunately persists (although the attitude against oral history is not as strong as it was in the late 19th and early 20th centuries [see, *e.g.*, Thompson 1978; Montell 1970]), in spite of demonstrated correspondences between oral history and geological, archeological, genealogical and other forms of documentary evidence (*e.g.*, DeLaguna 1958; Sturtevant 1968:466-467). There also are instances in which records are scarce and oral testimony is the major — if not sole — basis of historiography (Montell 1970) and in which primary sources such as newspapers do not accurately record events (Goodwyn 1971). Actually, biases are inevitable in all historiography, for writing history involves choosing some facts and neglecting others on the basis of some criteria considered significant by the historiographer (Sturtevant 1968:466-467).

Although it is essential to assess the historicity of a collection of historical data, to do this alone may be the more important question. It has been recognized for some time that notions of time and of what constitutes historical truth vary from one culture to the next, and that the preservation of historical accounts is directly related to the structure of a society (Vansina 1973). Any set of historical beliefs held by members of a society (or folk history), whether preserved and transmitted in oral or written form, reveals much of the culture of a society (Hudson 1966). When one folk history can be compared to another, the congruities and discrepancies throw cultural values into relief, revealing the differential significance of events. In some cases, the discrepancies between different

accounts remain, leaving one no closer to the “truth,” but rather with a healthy awareness of the existence of diametric accounts and of the relativity of historical validity (see, *e.g.*, Day 1972; Goodwyn 1971; Gould 1966; Hudson 1966; Kessel 1974; Sturtevant 1968).

There are several ways to evaluate the historicity of Joseph Sutton’s oral history, including comparing this version of history with the versions of other informants or with documentary data, or by repeated interviews on the same topic and checks on the internal consistency of the material (Kluckhohn 1945:129-131; Langness 1965:39-43). Of these, repeated interviews and comparison with documentary materials yielded the most comparative material. Information offered spontaneously or elicited on different occasions yielded redundant data, with sequences and specific details in the episodes being highly patterned and predictable. With one or two exceptions (noted below), interviews with other informants did not yield information that was either ample enough or contained sufficient overlap for comparative purposes.

The comparison of some of the episodes in this folk history to both primary and secondary documentary sources reveals several correspondences, including the following:

(1) As stated in the first passage, documentary sources suggest also that Black soldiers were courageous in battle (see, *e.g.*, Brown 1867:168-211; Cornish 1966:261-291; McPherson 1965:183-192; Quarles 1953:214-225; Wilson 1890:250-265). But did they fight at Fort Sumter? It does not appear that Blacks fought in the 1861 battles at this fort in the harbor at Charleston, South Carolina, for they were not recruited in any numbers until 1862 (Cornish 1966:264ff). Instead, Joseph Sutton may have been describing the 1863 battle at Fort Wagner in Charleston Harbor. In this battle, the Black Fifty-fourth Massachusetts regiment led a remarkable assault, returning time and again under fire, and this performance was widely publicized (Brown 1867:198-241; McPherson 1965:188-191; Wilson 1890:250-265).

(2) As stated in the second passage, documentary sources confirm that Blacks were indeed recruited from Talbot County into the Union Army (Clark 1952:179; Koger 1942:8; Blassingame 1963, 1967). Recruitment began in Baltimore in 1863 (was this when Matthew Roberts was recruited?). The enlistments began in Talbot County in late 1863. They generated confusion and led to protests from slave-owners who lost labor at harvest time (Blassingame 1963; Clark 1952:184; Duncan 1977:366-370). In September 1863, Blacks were recruited in Miles River Neck and a contemporary remarked that Edward Lloyd “lost at the time as many as 84 able bodied hands and . . . enough have not been left him ‘to black his boots’ as a low fellow remarked” (Wagandt 1967:135; *Easton Gazette*, September 12 and 19, 1863). The enlistments continued in 1864, when a company of Black soldiers arrived to recruit free Blacks and slaves (*Easton Gazette*, March 5, 18, 26, 1864). It may have been at this point, or during the preceding year, that Ben Blackwell recruited slaves from Edward Lloyd’s farms. Documents shed no light on the episodes involving Perry Blake and Harrison Roberts.

(3) As suggested in the third passage, documentary sources also reveal that some Talbot County Whites did fight for the South. Other versions suggest that they moved along the Chesapeake to Virginia, secretly in order to avoid Union-sympathizers, and that they fought for the Confederacy either with Virginia regiments or as the First

Maryland Confederate Regiment (Mulliken 1959; Preston 1976). From time to time, "Rebel Soldiers" were arrested in Talbot County (*Easton Gazette*, November 7, 1863).

It is quite probable that other episodes, when compared with documentary data, will show similar degrees of correspondence. For example, that Edward Lloyd was indeed "against the recruitin," although not directly stated in a written source (the Lloyd Papers are silent on this), is suggested by several other pieces of information: Lloyd was a delegate at an 1858 slaveholders convention (*Easton Gazette*, October 30, 1858, November 13, 1858); Lloyd lived in Miles River Neck where, in 1863 "the few land owners . . . have proverbially all that can be had" (Wagandt 1967:135); and the husband of one of Lloyd's sisters fought for the Confederacy (Ingraham 1898:178). In similar fashion, it may be possible to locate documents which can be compared to the incident involving Matthew Roberts in the Virginia battle. It is plausible that Confederate soldiers killed wounded Union men following a Virginia battle, as they did at the notorious Fort Pillow massacre in 1864 (McPherson 1965:216ff).

Many episodes probably can never be compared with documentary sources, for the simple reason that they are unlikely to be preserved in written form. This is the case in the passages on Perry Blake, on the recruitment of Harrison Roberts, the escape of Matthew Roberts and the experiences of Alex Flamer, John Copper and Ike Johnson. The sources of these episodes were either other men in Miles River Neck or, as in the case of Perry Blake, "I heard the man tell it hisself." One interesting variation exists in the incident in which John Copper was said to have shot off his forefinger: a second informant (born 1903) maintains that it was his (and Joseph Sutton's) grandfather Alex Flamer, not John Copper, who shot off his forefinger.

Equally important as these exercises in validity, is to examine the passages for what they reveal of criteria selected by Joseph Sutton as meaningful in his presentation of historical material. Three themes run through these and other selections from this folk history: a caustic retrospective glimpse of one slaveowner but an acknowledgement of the role of Quakers; pride in the accomplishments of Blacks in battle; and stress on the creativity of Blacks and on their ability to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances.

Lloyd is contrasted to the Quakers in these passages. Lloyd was a wealthy owner of land and slaves, who was against recruiting and emancipation, and who had an overseer who wanted to whip Matthew Roberts.

Quakers, on the other hand, were said to be instrumental in convincing the North that Blacks could fight. In the years preceding the Civil War, Quakers were active in the abolition movement and in the Underground Railroad, but most advocated nonviolence as the War approached — a posture that "was sound Quaker doctrine, and sprang from a deep-lying conviction of the validity of nonviolent resistance to evil" (Drake 1950:194). Still, there was a radical Quaker minority, members of which pressed for immediate emancipation, joined Brown at Harper's Ferry and, later on, went to War and urged others to do so. Some were commissioned in a Black regiment from Massachusetts, where the earliest Black regiments were mustered (Drake 1950:184-200).

On the Eastern Shore, some Quakers assisted in the Underground Railroad and in abolition movements in the late 1850s, in spite of risks: one Quaker apprehended by Whites and accused of helping a slave to escape had to leave the state for fear of being lynched (Carroll 1970:142-143).

More important than Quakers in the initial recruitment decision were probably the devastating losses of the Union Army in 1862 and the need for more men (Cornish 1966:96ff). Still, some Quakers may have been active and it may be this minority referred to by Joseph Sutton.

Of greater importance to the contrast between Lloyd and the Quakers may be a more immediate circumstance: Blacks returning to Miles River Neck following the Civil War leased and later bought, from a Quaker, contiguous lots that expanded into the major all-Black settlement in Miles River Neck. Lloyd, who owned roughly one-half the Neck, never sold any land to Blacks. And land was regarded as crucial for people who "had no place to go."

The second theme is pride in accomplishments of Miles River Neck Blacks. This emerges clearly in the passages in which Blacks were said to charge repeatedly the Fort in Charleston Harbor and in which Ike Johnson, one of Lloyd's former slaves, caught the flag before it hit the ground and carried it the remainder of the War. As Joseph Sutton stresses, these Blacks were brave, but they were fighting for their freedom; he also suggests that without Black soldiers, "the South would've whipped the North." This theme, as reservoir of pride in Black courage, was picked up by Joseph Sutton also in his discussions on the Spanish American War. Blacks were courageous, but Whites still regarded them as likely to run. Thomas Higginson, a White who was appointed Colonel of the Black First South Carolina Volunteers, wrote in 1870 that Blacks who escaped from slavery showed as much courage as any of the White officers of the regiment and that neither he nor his White officers regarded Blacks as any less (or more) brave than Whites (1962:237). Still, the historian Dudley Cornish wrote almost one hundred years after the Civil War that "Negro soldiers . . . have always to prove themselves over and over again" (1966:262). Joseph Sutton's concern that Blacks be shown to have been brave reflects his belief that doubts in the courage of Black soldiers remain and need to be dispelled. A substantial body of literature supports his claims (Brown 1867:168-211; Cornish 1966:261-291; Higginson 1962:passim; McPherson 1965:164-167, 183-192; Quarles 1953:214-225; Wilson 1890:200-265).

The third theme is the ability of Blacks to recognize the implications of the situations that they find themselves in and to do something about these situations; in short, there was constant adaptation to rapidly changing and unpredictable circumstances. Blacks come alive as active, creative, problem-solving actors, not as passive respondents to events totally out of their control (although they were still susceptible to unequal pay and remuneration). Thus, Joseph Sutton says that Harrison Roberts "pulled the woods over" the recruiting party and avoided going off to war; Matthew Roberts escaped from slavery and managed to get to Baltimore; Alex Flamer began to shoot off the target to avoid being chosen as a short-lived sharpshooter; and John Copper shot off his forefinger to keep himself out of the front lines. The significance attached to this final incident is revealing: Joseph Sutton interprets this not as an act of cowardice but as a smart move, because John Copper had been a houseboy at the main Lloyd house during slavery, he learned to read there, and according to Joseph Sutton, he was one of the founders of the all-Black hamlet, Copperville, and an individual to whom other Blacks turned for assistance and advice. Thus, shooting his finger off "was a benefit to him and the others."

To conclude, oral testimony of this sort must be evaluated both for its overlap with other versions of history and for what it reveals of the criteria deemed significant for the selection of events. The first is absolutely essential in cases — such as this one — where the testimony comes from a single informant; the second point is by far the most interesting in its exposure of a meaningful slice of the world view of one informant. The Civil War and the Emancipation were monumental events, and as Joseph Sutton remarked,

I heard em speakin of John Blackwell's mother, Rosey puttin the hay in the barn. And they had heard talk of this gettin free. And the Colonel rode up. And they asked him, say, "Master Eddie," say, "I heard we was going to be freed," say, "we goin to be freed?" "No!" say "You'll never be free as long as I've got a nail on this thumb. And put that hay in the loft." I think the war had started, but the North couldn't whip the South. The Colonel made a bad guess though.

NOTES

1. The research on which this paper is based was conducted intermittently during 1976-1978 and was supported by the Wye Institute and the George Mason University Foundation. My debt of gratitude to Joseph Sutton is evident. Peter W. Black, John W. Blassingame, Crandall Shifflett, August Meier, Lynwood Montell and Benjamin Quarles commented on an earlier version of this paper. The shortcomings that remain are mine alone.
2. Neither Miles River Neck nor the names of my informant, Joseph Sutton, and the former Miles River Neck residents mentioned in this paper are pseudonyms. This departure from the general anthropological tendency to ensure anonymity and confidentiality reflects the express wish of Joseph Sutton that this history be recorded.
3. An important element not pursued in the analysis that follows is the source of some of Joseph Sutton's memories. Some clearly must have come from Miles River Neck Blacks; others may have come from newspapers or television. Although Joseph Sutton attended school for only several months, he taught himself to read — first the Bible, then at age fourteen *Swiss Family Robinson*, and in his 'teens, sports magazines. He associated with Whites moreso than most other Blacks in Miles River Neck. He read newspapers and watched television in the mid 1970s when he was interviewed, and was conversant not only on Miles River Neck, but on events happening currently in Africa and Asia.
4. This should not obscure the facts that the southernmost western shore counties were pro-South and that riots broke out in Baltimore, the heterogeneous and industrialized capital, over whether Northern troops should be allowed to pass through the city. In 1862, the Maryland Senate adopted an antiwar position; many people regarded as repressive the pro-Union measures of federal and military officials (Bast 1950; Clark 1952; Duncan 1977). And the Eastern Shore was not unilaterally opposed to the Union; one Talbot County town produced a Union Company (Mulliken 1959).
5. An attempt has been made to ensure that the orthographical representations reflect Joseph Sutton's speech patterns. These patterns, which are as characteristic of the "rustic" Tidewater class (Atwood 1951; Kurath 1949) as of ethnicity (Labov 1972; Moulton 1976; Stewart 1971; Wolfram 1971) include: the substitution of /n/ for /ing/ in present particles; pronunciation of voiced and voiceless /th/ except in /them/; simplification of some final consonants; /here/ pronounced variably /chere/; transposition of /to/ for /at/ or /in/; deletion of initial elements in before, about, of course, because; deletion of articles, prepositions, pronouns; hypercorrections; undifferentiated pronouns; double negatives; variation in formation of past tenses. The transcription reflects these phonological and syntactical variations. In addition, a decision has been made to delete items that would call attention to "nonstandard" aspects of Sutton's speech (/runnin/, note /runnin'/ [standard/running/], in accord with the primary responsibilities to faithfully reflect speech patterns, to avoid eye dialect, and to avoid imposing assumptions of standard or nonstandard speech forms.

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